

CLAIM AMENDMENTS

1. (Currently Amended) A suture passer comprising:
a longitudinally extending hollow cannula having a central passage slidably receivable of a surgical suture;
a manually graspable handle adapted to engage said hollow cannula for manipulation thereof, said handle having a distal end, a proximal end, and an ~~upper surface~~ intermediate portion;
first suture guide means ~~connected to said upper surface~~ formed by a first body portion of said handle proximate to said the distal end of said handle and having a channel therethrough for releasably, guidingly holding said the surgical suture;
second suture guide means ~~connected to said upper surface~~ formed by a second body portion of said handle proximal to said first suture guide means and having a channel therethrough for releasably, guidingly holding said the surgical suture; and
~~locking means for releasably, lockingly maintaining said cannula in a substantially fixed position relative to said handle~~
said intermediate portion having an exposed surface for supporting the surgical suture, the exposed surface being disposed between the first and second body portions and configured to expose the surgical suture.

2. (Original) A suture passer according to claim 1 further comprising means for disengaging said cannula from said handle.

3. (Currently Amended) A suture passer according to claim 1 wherein said hollow cannula includes a proximal portion, and further wherein said proximal portion of said cannula is receivable within a first bore formed in the first body portion of said handle, ~~said the~~ bore terminating at a ~~distal~~ proximal

opening adjacent to said ~~upper~~ exposed surface of said handle intermediate portion between said first and second ~~suture-guide~~ ~~means~~ body portions.

4. -11. (Canceled)

12. (Currently Amended) A suture passer according to claim 1 wherein said cannula is sharply pointed at ~~its~~ a distal end thereof.

13. (Currently Amended) A suture passer according to claim 12 wherein said cannula is rounded off at ~~the~~ a heel of ~~its tip~~ the distal end so as to minimize the possibility of damaging suture during a tissue piercing operation.

14. - 17. (Canceled)